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A BROAD—CHURCHMAN?

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE
HUMANITIES IN CANDIDACY FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

1934

By
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Although Frederick Denison Maurice, from about 1853 until his death in 1872, was frequently spoken of as a member of the Broad-Church school in the Church of England, and was considered by some of his contemporaries both the founder of that school and the greatest of the Broad-Churchmen, and although he is today usually referred to as a leader of the Broad-Church movement, his relation to it was not simple. He himself steadfastly refused to accept the label of "Broad-Churchman" for himself and to admit the need for a Broad-Church party. What the school stood for is as elusive of definition, furthermore, as his own thought was complex. Yet the question, in spite of its difficulty, is well worth going into, since its exploration serves to illustrate not only the difference between conservatism and liberalism, but also the differences between some of the forms of liberalism within itself. A satisfactory answer to the question would also do much to make clear the meaning and the nature of the Broad-Church movement.

The popular use of the term *Broad-Church* as applied to a type of liberalism within the Church of England arose near the middle of the nineteenth century. Benjamin Jowett, according to the *New English Dictionary*, said that the term was first proposed, in his hearing, by Arthur Hugh Clough, and that it became colloquially familiar in Oxford circles a few years before 1850.¹ Some significance should also be attached to an article by A. P. Stanley, published in the *Edinburgh Review* for July, 1850, which asserted that the English church was, "by the very conditions of its being, not High or Low, but Broad."² But the general use of the term probably should be

¹ Ed. J. A. H. Murray (Oxford and New York, 1888), I, 1117.

² "Report of the Judgment in the Case of Gorham versus the Bishop of Exeter," *Edin. Rev.*, XCII (1850), 266.

dated from October, 1853, when an unsigned article by W. J. Conybeare entitled "Church Parties" appeared in the same periodical. This article, which compared in some detail what its author considered the characteristic tendencies of Broad-Churchism with those of the other parties in the Anglican church, said that this party had been called "Moderate, Catholic, or Broad-Church, by its friends; Latitudinarian or Indifferent by its enemies."³ Sir Leslie Stephen in his sketch of Maurice in the *Dictionary of National Biography* (1894) gave Conybeare credit for originating the name.⁴

Maurice himself undoubtedly believed that Conybeare invented the term. In 1856, three years after the appearance of Conybeare's article, he said, in referring to its author, that he "ventured upon the perilous experiment of coining a new nickname which was eagerly welcomed by hundreds," but that "the conceptions which have been formed of his meaning by those who have adopted his phrase have certainly been anything but clear and definite."⁵ In a letter to the Rev. Isaac Taylor, dated April 10, 1860, he said "I do not know well what the Broad-Church is. I always took it to be a fiction of Conybeare's."⁶

What the Broad-Church movement was cannot be set down without difficulty. It was, to be sure, a type of religious liberalism within the Anglican church; but the main difficulty lies in distinguishing between it and other types of liberalism with which it can by no means be identified. The Broad-Churchmen, furthermore, did not form a compact and homogeneous party or school, but differed among themselves as much, frequently, as they differed from others not belonging to their group. As Liberals, they would naturally disagree on many important points. That there were, however, certain tendencies of thoughts which were common to them all was recognized by their contemporaries and has been regarded as a certainty

3 *Edin. Rev.*, XCVIII (1853), 330 ff.

4 (London, 1894), XXXVII, 104.

5 "Essay on Archdeacon Hare's Position in the Church, with Reference to the Parties That Divide It," J. C. Hare's *The Victory of Faith*, ed. E. H. Plumptre (3rd ed.; London, 1874), p. [xvii].

6 *The Life of Frederick Denison Maurice, Chiefly Told in His Own Letters*, ed. by his son Frederick Maurice (3rd ed.; London, 1884) [hereafter referred to as *the Life*], II, 358-9. H. R. Haweis related the following anecdote about Maurice. "I one day inadvertently let drop the word 'Broad Church.' 'Broad Church! I am sure I don't know what you mean; if you mean the so-called liberal theologians, they seem to me extremely narrow.' 'Broad Church,' he used to say, 'is a fiction of Conybeare's. I never had, and never will have, anything to do with it.' " "Frederick Denison Maurice," *Contemporary Review*, LXV (1894), 877.

ever since the movement gained momentum in the middle of the century. These tendencies may be indicated by a survey of the successive attempts to define the movement which have been made since 1853.

Conybeare, in his article on "Church Parties" (1853), said that Broad-Churchmen were characterized by their desire for comprehension, by their adopting Charity and Toleration as their watchwords, by their belief that the balancing and compromising character of the Church of England was among her greatest claims to admiration, by their belief that the principle of toleration should be pushed still farther, that the superficial difficulties between Christians were as nothing in comparison with their essential agreement, and that "the portals of the church should be flung as widely open as the gates of Heaven." They were of the opinion, according to Conybeare, that the essential doctrines of the church had been held by Christians in every age, both Protestants and Catholics. They objected to the ascription, by either Puritan or Papist, of magic virtue to outward acts. They embraced the positive and rejected the negative in other beliefs. They gave a special prominence to the idea of the "Visible Church." They deserved chief credit for "the great advance recently made in the secular instruction of the poor." But they had "so little organization or mutual concert of any kind" that they could scarcely be called a party at all.⁷

Sir Leslie Stephen, in an article entitled "The Broad Church," published in 1870, said that Broad-Churchmen, although they should be condemned for compromising love of truth with reverence for tradition, should be praised for meeting arguments fairly, and admitting in theory the importance of "searching, fair and unfettered inquiry." He implied, however, that they did not always put their theory into practice.⁸

E. H. Plumptre, writing in 1874, set forth three characteristics of Broad-Churchmen: first, a refusal to run in party grooves or to be bound by party shibboleths; second, a disclaiming of the party character; third, an attitude which never shrank from taking up an unpopular cause when truth and justice required it.⁹

⁷ *Op. cit.*, pp. 330-42.

⁸ *Fraser's Mag.*, LXXXI (March, 1870), 316.

⁹ Preface to J. C. Hare's *The Victory of Faith* (3rd ed.; London, 1874) p. xv.

"R. E. B.," in an article entitled "The Broad Church Movement" (1878), said that the movement was a tendency rather than a party and that it lacked any bond of "dogmatic agreement." It could hardly be said to have, he asserted, either a literature or leaders or objects in the same sense as had the other two great parties which divided the church. He quoted McLeod Campbell's statement that they were a party "*rather as asking freedom to think than as having formed thoughts.*" It was the party of inquiry, while the others were parties of authority. A Broad-Churchman was one who, whatever his views on this and that department of theological belief might be, had not accepted them second-hand or on the authority of a church or a party or a teacher, but had, so far as in him lay, "hammered them out painfully by the sweat of his brow," and had, so far as the faculty and the opportunity were given to him, "patiently proved all things before accepting them into his mental armoury." The Broad-Churchman believed that revelation was given, not once and for all, but gradually during different ages, that neither the sixteenth nor the nineteenth century had a monopoly on truth. His great danger was that of giving "too exclusive attention to the intellectual side of religion." The outstanding Broad-Churchmen, listed in chronological order, were: Bishop Butler, Archbishop Whately, Dr. Thomas Arnold, F. D. Maurice, and Charles Kingsley.¹⁰

Connop Thirlwall, in his *Remains, Literary and Theological* (1878), said that "the proper antithesis to Broad is not High or Low, but Narrow." He gave a brief definition of the Broad-Church characteristic.

"I understand it as signifying a certain stamp of individual character, which I would describe as a disposition to recognize and appreciate that which is true and good under all varieties of forms, and in persons separated from one another by the most conflicting opinions."

He named Jeremy Taylor and Archdeacon J. C. Hare as typical Broad-Churchmen.¹¹

Principal John Tulloch, in *Movements of Religious Thought in Britain During the Nineteenth Century* (1885), asserted that the great work of the Broad-Churchmen, like that of the Cambridge Platonists, was apologetic, not dogmatic. They advanced theological inquiry by their rational spirit and

¹⁰ *Fraser's Mag.*, XCVII (March, 1878), 353-64.

¹¹ Ed. J. J. S. Perowne (London, 1878), III, 481.

by their "fearless assertion of the rights of Theology in the face of Modern Science." With "low-breathed Scepticism" facing them on the one hand and "mere formal theology" facing them on the other, they were "witnesses for a Christianity that had nothing to fear from the progress of Knowledge." They presented "man's essential Divinity in Christ, as lying at the basis of all true thought." Broad-Churchism was "essentially a reconstruction movement of Christian ideas which were losing their hold on contemporary minds."¹²

The *New English Dictionary* (1888) defined *Broad Church* as "A designation popularly applied to the members of the Church of England who take its formularies and doctrines in a broad or liberal sense, and hold that the church should be comprehensive and tolerant, so as to admit more or less variety of opinion in matters of dogma and ritual."¹³

V. F. Storr, in *The Development of English Theology in the Nineteenth Century, 1800-1860* (1913), contrasted the Broad-Church and Oxford movements by saying that the former "sought to justify religion by an appeal to the spiritual instincts of humanity, and gave to reason a larger meaning than Newman gave it."¹⁴

These definitions, although they do not include all of those which have shed light on the subject, represent fairly accurately the conceptions of the movement which have been presented. They agree, for the most part, in considering Broad-Churchism a form of religious liberalism which worked towards toleration. But when they are compared with each other they show that a confusion has existed, due to the inclination of some to define it so as to include the whole liberal movement in religious thought and of others to limit it to include only those who, like Maurice, were liberals only in a special sense. The distinction between the two conceptions of liberalism is highly essential to a clear understanding both of what the Broad-Church movement was, and of what kind of liberalism is to be associated with Maurice. What was the difference, we may ask, between the Broad-Church, as it was generally thought of, and Maurice's

¹² (New York, 1893), p. 278.

¹³ Vol. I, p. 1117. For later developments in the Broad-Church movement, see H. R. Haweis, "The Broad Church," *Contemporary Review*, LVII (1890), 900-910. The treatment here, however, is not very penetrating.

¹⁴ (London, New York, etc., 1913), p. 284.

conception of the Universal Church? Maurice's own comments on the Broad-Church help to answer the question.

Maurice was very positive in denying that he should be called a "Broad-Churchman." His son said that the title was given to his father by those who, finding it "not very easy to get him and all about him conveniently in a nutshell, . . . solved the difficulty by dubbing him a Broad-Churchman, not that they had the faintest notion what they meant by the phrase" except that it was in common use.¹⁵ Maurice himself stated emphatically that his own "disease" was one which he neither caught "by contact with any of the Broad-Church school" nor communicated to them.¹⁶

He persistently maintained this position, because, in the first place, he feared either that Broad-Churchmen were already a party or that they showed a strong tendency to become one. He had always felt that to maintain the position of a true Churchman he must be hostile to all parties.¹⁷ "I cannot enter a party," he said, "for the sake of compassing an end which involves the destruction of party."¹⁸ It made no difference to him if "Comprehension" was the slogan of the new party.

"We separate from our fellows, on the plea that they are not sufficiently comprehensive; we strive to break down fences which other people have raised, even while we are making a thicker and more thorny one ourselves."¹⁹

A Broad-Church party, "such as has been dreamed of," was to him both unnecessary and impossible.²⁰ The thing which he most feared was that a set of men might select from his teaching a number of tenets which they would exalt as infallible shibboleths, and thus make a new test for determining who were the "elect."²¹ He would not belong to a party, even if "No Party" were inscribed on its banner.²²

15 *Life*, II, 527.

16 "The Thirty-nine Articles and the Broad-Church," *Spectator*, XLIII (1870), 435. Cf. also Sir Edward Strachey, "Recollections of F. D. Maurice," *Cornhill Mag.*, LXXV (Apr., 1897), 541 n. Contrast Thirlwall's attitude: "... I cannot bring myself to treat 'Broad Church' as a term of reproach" (*op. cit.*, p. 481).

17 *Life*, I, 181-2.

18 *Ibid.*, II, 7.

19 *Theological Essays* (3rd ed.; London and New York, 1871), p. 6.

20 "Essay on Hare's Position," J. C. Hare's *Victory of Faith*, p. xix.

21 *Life*, II, 607-8. His son wrote: "Beyond all other things he dreaded becoming the head of a party of Christian Socialists. His great wish was to Christianize Socialism, not to Christian-Socialize the universe." (*Ibid.*, p. 41).

22 *Ibid.*, I, 239.

A second reason for his refusal to join those who professed themselves Broad-Churchmen is that he took them to be the sort of liberals who cared little or nothing for the time-honored beliefs and practices of the Church of England, or for the study of theology. He supposed that the Broad-Church was a representation, under different modifications, of that creed "contained in Whately's books," or of that which had arisen at Oxford "out of reaction against Tractarianism."²³ He could go along with them, he said, so far as they protested "against any cowardice and deceit in handling the Word of God, against any misrepresentations of sceptics, against any traditional hardness or formality."²⁴ Their tendency to deify man's intellect, however, instead of using the reason to perceive and acknowledge a living God, he found highly objectionable.²⁵ He could not agree with them that the Anglican liturgy was "an old praying machine," which in the course of centuries got out of order like other machines, and which had to be altered "according to the improved mechanical notions" of the nineteenth century.²⁶ These liberals were to him "emphatically anti-theological, . . . ready to tolerate all opinions in theology, only because people could know nothing about it, and because other studies were much better pursued without reference to it."²⁷ "But," he exclaimed, "their breadth seems to me narrowness. They include all kinds of opinions. But what message have they for the people who do not live upon opinions or care for opinions?"²⁸

Maurice could not, furthermore, join those Broad-Churchmen who discredited the Thirty-Nine Articles. The Articles, he said, "do exhibit, to anyone who reads them either as a historical document or as a guide for the present, a union of Catholicism with Protestantism." He found in them "no hint of compromise," but a strong "spirit of assertion, . . . the assumption that without individuality and nationality there can be no unity, no universality," but merely something like Roman Catholicism. The Articles protested, moreover, against excessive Protestantism, thriving only at the expense of unity.

23 *Ibid.*, II, 358-9.

24 *Ibid.*

25 *Ibid.*

26 *Ibid.*

27 *Ibid.*, I, 183-4.

28 *Ibid.*

Maurice asserted that although his own century had developed a need for a more comprehensive humanity and a more spiritual theology than had existed in the sixteenth, "the groundwork of this theology and this humanity" had been laid bare in the Thirty-Nine Articles, to which, he said, his age must recur if it was to escape destruction from sectarianism. The Broad-Church, he objected, sought to glorify its own age at the expense of all others.

"All I can hear from it is a cry to leave the sixteenth century and believe in the nineteenth. So long as I believe in God, I do not mean to believe in any century; though I may earnestly believe that He has assigned a work to every century which no other can perform, and which it can only perform when it looks before and behind and ceases to glorify itself."²⁹

Much of the confusion which has appeared in discussions of the Broad-Church ever since a controversy over the subject was precipitated by the publication of *Essays and Reviews* in 1860 has resulted from lumping together all the liberals in the Anglican Church under the label "Broad-Churchmen," and from a failure to distinguish between the two major groups of these liberals. The one group, which included Copleston, Whately, Hampden, Dr. Arnold, Blanco White, Baden Powell, and Jowett, was closely associated with Oxford.³⁰ The other group, the Coleridgians, which included Coleridge himself, Julius Charles Hare, John Sterling, F. D. Maurice, Charles Kingsley, and, in many respects, Carlyle, Tennyson, and Browning, tended to associate itself with Cambridge. Although both schools advocated freedom of inquiry and assertion, the Oxford school was predominantly Aristotelian and displayed a faith in formal logic, while the Cambridge school was predominantly Platonic and Kantian, and tended to be hostile to mere logic, at the same time that it was favorably disposed towards the use of the intuition, or the "reason" of Coleridge and Kant, as a means to the perception of truth. Both groups welcomed the progress of science and of textual criticism of the Bible, but the Oxford school tended to exalt the intellect above all else, while the Cambridge group insisted that the intellect could not of itself create truth, which God must reveal, and that the only sure

29 The whole paragraph is abstracted from "The Thirty-nine Articles and the Broad-Church," *Spectator*, XLIII (1870), 434-5.

30 An excellent study of this group has been made by the Rev. W. Tuckwell in *Pre-Tractarian Oxford: A Reminiscence of the Oriel "Noetics"* (London, 1909).

evidence of truth was in the testimony of the whole man, not merely in that of the understanding. The first group, in its love for progress and change, became hostile to tradition and church authority; the second loved progress, but sought to reconcile love of change with reverence for the past and its institutions. Although both venerated history, the former read history in the light of the present, the latter, in the light of what they took to be "eternal principles." The first group was of necessity entirely out of sympathy with the Oxford movement, which was in part a protest against their tendencies of thought; the second, although unable to agree with the Tractarians on many vital points, had much in common with them. It is not strange that Maurice felt that he could not be properly classed with the whole mass of liberals composing both groups.

To understand Maurice's position, we must bear in mind that his Church Universal was conceived as resting upon eternal, immutable truth. Each man, he taught, must seek out this truth for himself, by the power of his God-given reason. No man could receive it second-hand from a party or from any other intermediary. He could not create it with his understanding, or intellect, as many liberals would like to do. Since truth was eternal, it did not grow with time. The *revelation* of it, however, did progress from age to age. One age, of course, might get a clearer and broader glimpse of the truth than another. An age progressed only by building upon the foundations of the past, not by rejecting the large mass of truth discovered in the past for the small fraction of it discovered in the present. Not the time when truth was revealed, but the purity and wholeness of it whenever found was what mattered. If the Church of England, with its formularies and ritual, had proved itself a repository for a great portion of essential truth, then men should not reject this truth or any other, no matter when it had been formulated, merely because their own age might interpret it differently. Neither were they to stop seeking for truth, for truth was inexhaustible and became real to any man only when it became a part of him. But only truth would serve: compromise for the sake of comprehension, freedom of thought divorced from standards of truth, a passion for what is new which ignored the worth of what is old,—none of these, even if the Broad-Church rested upon them, could serve as the basis of a universal spiritual brotherhood. Maurice believed that conservatism and liberalism were the same thing to those who

aimed only at truth. Like his teacher, Coleridge,³¹ he combined a consuming desire for unity with a willingness to defend freedom of inquiry and assertion; a veneration for the truth that was old with a sincere respect for the truth that was new or still undiscovered; a conception of a God of power and love with a conception of a God of truth; and an insistence on man's rights as an individual with a like insistence on man's duties as a social being. Only in this sense was he a Broad-Churchman. If Maurice is to be called a Broad-Churchman (and it is probable that he will always be referred to as one in spite of his own objections), it follows that there cannot be a real Broad-Church party, although there may be individual Broad-Churchmen and even a Broad-Church movement.

31 I have made a detailed study of Maurice's indebtedness to Coleridge in "The Relation of Frederick Denison Maurice to Coleridge," Dissertation for the Ph. D. The University of Chicago, 1934.

